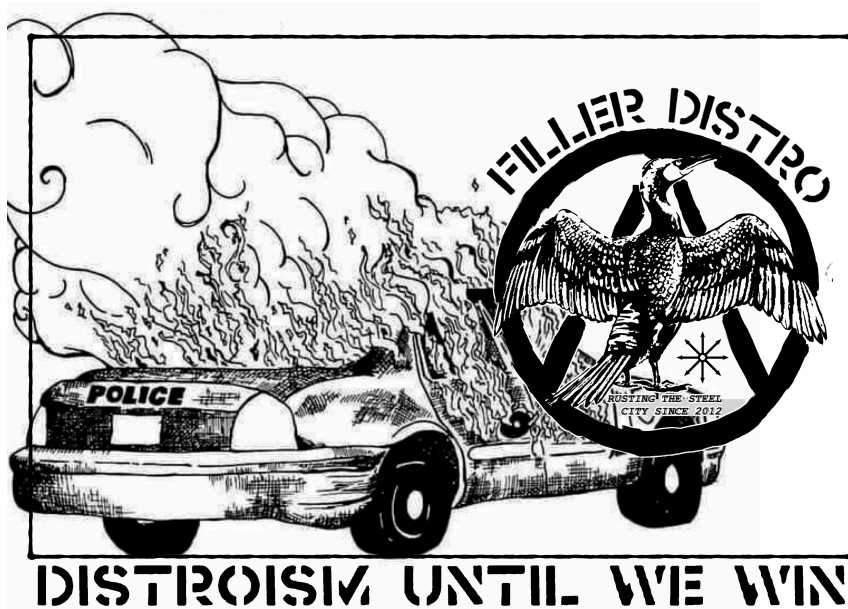


RELATIONSHIP ANARCHY
+
MORALITY
=
RELATIONSHIP COMMUNISM

RELATIONSHIP COMMUNISM: AN INFANTILE DISORDER

*An antimoralist critique of The Relationship
Anarchy Discussions (RAD) Content Library*



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Zines Mentioned:

Kill The Couple in Your Head <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-kill-the-couple-in-your-head>

Down With “Partners” <https://medium.com/@camxfree/down-with-partners-a616da0930a0>

Against Monogamism, For Liberation! <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/your-friendly-local-anti-monogamists-against-monogamism-for-liberation-anti-monogamy-as-anarchi>

Cheat to Win <https://medium.com/@camxfree/cheat-to-win-strategies-to-build-anti-monogamist-solidarity-73c1752260bc>

I’m a proud #homewrecker, AMA <https://medium.com/@camxfree/im-a-proud-homewrecker-ama-eed1781d2d3a>

*Anonymous
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These lessons taught me how to interact with myself, my friends, and what goes on between us in unmediated ways.

By celebrating both my autonomy and my interdependence with others, I began to see a path beyond the miserable rationalistic cosmology that trapped me. This unusual strength I've obtained has led me to so many treasured experiences, but above all the lightest lesson it continues to teach me is simply how to sit with life's expansive and often terrifying complexities.

That that we can finally move through the world together without needing to pretend that there's some kind of total solution we can up with to fix everything.

As an anarchist I often feel weighed down by how few opportunities I think I have to actualize my desires while struggling to survive in a civilization that's hostile to everything living.

The institutions that I would most love to see done away with are always the ones that feel way too big for me to even touch, let alone confront in any sort of way that doesn't feel self-destructive or symbolic. At the end of the day, it's always from this dark place that we as anarchists can choose to ask ourselves how we want to live.

A big part of my ongoing answer to this question involves experimenting with anarchy at a smaller, human-sized scale because it's at this level I find the most capacity for action, thought, and play. It shouldn't be surprising then that I've found I can feel embodied and able to express my agency as an anarchist in the relationships I share with others.

These relationships are so precious to me in part because it is *within them* where I can finally find so much room for things like risk taking, adventure, experimentation, desire and imagination. So many of the normal walls I run into are gone in this space. Over the years I've learned with others how to make our relationships more of our own creation by figuring out how to extricate ourselves from the baggage of things like scarcity, behavioral norms, gender roles, etc. It's empowering feeling your relationships get richer as you shed off the things that suffocate you. My relationships nourish me, they enable me to do more with my life and continue to teach me how grow into a person I'm proud of.

I've never felt like calling myself a Relationship Anarchist because, to me, anarchy isn't something that's confined to any given aspect of my life. Still, I've learned a lot over the years from texts that have used this term and conversations with people who choose to identify that way. There are many worthwhile ideas and critiques to be found under this banner, and it's nice to encounter writing that's explicitly about practicing anarchy on a smaller person-to-person scale instead of broader theorizations around things like queerness, feminism, etc.

The Relationship Anarchy Discussions Content Library (RAD) is a group that's been actively distroing zines about relationship anarchism. Even though a lot of the content they engage with is close to my heart, I am interested in critiquing the morality and prescriptive relationship to language that runs through their work. The morality in their project is important to break apart

because it gets in the way of intimately engaging with what's powerful in ideas like relationship anarchism. This kind of critique also feels worth pursuing because it's so boring and upsetting how widespread the tendency to moralize has gotten within broader anarchist conversations.

Looking at the RAD Zine *Down with "Partners"*

I was first excited to read *Down with "Partners"* thinking it would be similar to the provocative Relationship Anarchist zine *Kill the Couple in your Head*. After giving a quick introduction and explanation of how labels can be stifling, RAD introduces a series of their theoretical concepts which are crucial to understanding the nature of their project:

Labels like "partner" typically refer to relationships based on the Relationship Escalator, a default set of norms for how relationships "should" look and progress through defined stages from casual interactions to merging into a shared life and family.

This performance of relationships is founded in Monogamism, a system that prioritizes sexual and romantic relationships that adhere to normative social scripts over other types of intimacy. It controls people's behaviors and desires through amatonormativity (linkage of romance and sex with intimacy), the couple form (two autonomous individuals merging into a couple-unit), and pedestalization of sex (prioritizing sex as a distinguishing factor in a relationship, and valuing relationships that include sex over others).

RAD's on to something when they argue that a lot of the ways that we are trained to practice and understand relationships are determined by oppressive forces like the nuclear family, patriarchy, and capitalism. These are the structures from which we inherit our ideas of the couple-form - that we're taught to feel genuinely incomplete without a partner. It's one of the ways we've been coerced into understanding desire from a perspective of lack and scarcity. It feels isolating to meet your needs when they don't fit within the normative frameworks of our society; when life tends to feel so grey and restrictive, when everywhere you go people are more or less uncritically relating in the same sorts of ways. For many people it can be exhilarating to move beyond these compulsory ways of relating, and often people discover that their supposed "needs" were sadly just things they were abused into thinking they depended on.

wasn't forcing myself to behave conventionally will always remain out of grasp.

RAD's pointing at something important with their project, insofar as they show us that people tend to live neurotically — that people are taught to express their intimacy through social structures that foster insecurity and rarely satisfy their needs. We police ourselves every day through our strict adherence to the ways we are supposed to speak, love, and touch one another. There's only loneliness and mediocrity within the walls we build around ourselves, and so long as we stay in our cages there are ways of living, creating and loving that remain inconceivable.

So then, what's the problem with their idea of Amatonormativity? It's that it uses morality to propose a democratic solution to an oppressive social structure. If we think of how the ways in which people limit intimacy as something that's Bad, then it's not hard to imagine how in the just world there would be a Good solution in which everyone would finally have their needs met. I've had conversations with relationship communists in which they were disappointed with how people in relationships would supposedly withhold affection from them. They argued that if the couple wasn't a couple that their touch and affection would then be equitably redistributed throughout a community instead of privately held (and presumably the relationship communist would receive their fair ration of the couple's cuddling too).

Isn't this just a recasting of the Christian notion of the meek inheriting the Earth? Isn't this democracy merely that same democracy of the schoolteacher who through discipline ensures every student gets the same amount of candy on Valentine's Day?

The things (relationship) anarchists need to thrive in life don't have their origins in the church or classroom. It's profound what people can do and invent with their love once they go beyond the institution of the couple. It's wonderful to bask in what happens when desire can be unleashed, when it ceases to be co-opted by the institutions of today or the hypothetical ones of a world to come. In short, when we finally learn to do what we want with it.

There's so much we can say and do as anarchists once we move beyond structures that mediate our lived experience. My life was definitely bleaker when I felt beholden to ideas of the couple, or to any of so many other constructed categories. For a while, I didn't know of much else beyond how these structures taught me to resent myself. It was only through taking risks with vibrant people I managed to encounter that I learned how to stop worshipping categories and started to create a fuller life.

When thought and critique gets this soaked in morality it gets hard to even view this type of thinking as anarchist anymore, even if parts of it resonate and feel anarchistic. Through things like our schooling, mass media and our families, we've been taught to fear solitude and learned to try and possess others to numb this fear. But it was also at these very same institutions where we learned about good and evil. *And these things aren't separate.*

There's a fundamental link between our moral education and every misguided lesson about love and desire that we subject others to — it's all cut from the same big cloth. Taken together, people use these teachings every day to run like a cockroach from anything fluid and ambiguous in life. If you don't go beyond a moralistic approach to (relationship) anarchism, you're going to be very miserable moving through a world that always manages to disappoint you and fall short of your otherworldly ideal.

In any case, it actually makes more sense to call a project that is essentially "Relationship Anarchy + Morality" something like "Relationship Communism" (hitherto referred to as such) because:

- There's a vanguard. Here we have a group of people who claim to know what the Good and Correct political thing to do is. Armed with a sense of duty, they use language in a way they deem pure and proper - what they literally call propaganda - to enlighten other people by showing them the righteous path.
- Also, like communism, there's a teleological aspect to RAD's project. RAD seems to believe that there could be heaven on Earth if only everyone just put in the correct and righteous kind of work towards resolving the contradictions of Monogamism. People fighting teleological battles - communists especially - constrain themselves by looking at what could be possible only from their narrow vantage point. It is from this perspective that one defers living in the present so that life can supposedly begin in tomorrow's better and just world.

The idea of relationship communism is further supported by how RAD conceptualizes touch as if it were a material resource, like money.

RAD uses (and maybe invents?) the word "Amatonormativity" to refer to how intangible things like affection, endearment and touch tend to be activities that you need to participate in the couple-form to have access to. I think it's extremely unfortunate how much physical intimacy we deny ourselves — there have been many nights where I wish there wasn't so much posturing and distancing I put between myself and people I care deeply about. I'll never have those nights again, and what could have been said and felt if I

RAD extends their concept of monogamism to include any kind of polyamorous relationship as well. They're not only against monogamy, but the idea of any kind of relationship that's qualified as romantic. It's been worthwhile for me to challenge the ways I've prioritized romantic partners over friends in the past. It can be annoying to be with a group of friends and have one partner constantly take the other one out of the room.

Still, I'm not convinced by RAD's argument that being in a polyamorous relationship necessarily affords the in-group with distinct social privileges or means that there are coercive power dynamics at play.

With this basic understanding of their ideas, we can now begin to see how RAD proceeds to poison their project by introducing the idea of morality into it. In the next section "Visibility Against the Couple Form" RAD encourages the reader to do their part and politically fight the couple form:

Maybe you already challenge these systems and learned behaviors through Relationship Anarchy or some other practice of non-hierarchical, non-rules-based, autonomy-reinforcing, community-oriented relationship building. That's great! Think about all the ways this creates joy, practical benefits, consistency with other political goals, and inspiration in your life and the lives of others around you. You may be modeling some of the values that will build a better, freer world. If you're doing this, and still using "partner" to describe your relationships, think about what that communicates to others.

No matter how radical your intimate relationships are in private, the way you publicly communicate about them is what others will see. Even if you personally believe that the way you use "partner" is different and radical and opposes Straight hegemony, it won't be perceived that way by almost any audience. Instead of inspiring others to anti-couple, anti-monogamist, Queer liberatory action, you are legitimizing the couple form and heterosexual script. By using this word, you lend support to the dominant relationship model and make it even more difficult for others to live outside the prison of normativity that traps them into monogamy, marriage, and Straightness.

It's in passages like this where I find a lot of issues with RAD's project. There's an important qualitative difference between challenging a way that society normalizes a behavior and trying to prefigure or create a world in

which that behavior *doesn't exist*. The first task is at a human scale, while the other one is monumental.

In *Kill the Couple in Your Head*, the authors argue that the couple-form is stifling and encourage the reader to unpack their adherence to it in order to re-conceptualize their lives and anarchist projects. They entice the reader with the possibilities of a beautiful life where you may do exhilarating things with the fellow travelers you encounter.

In RAD's case, the emphasis is instead placed on how participating in couples is *politically and morally the wrong thing to do*. It's healthy to be suspicious when reading "anarchist" texts that deal heavily with notions of sin, or ideas of Right and Wrong or Good and Evil.

I've been in relationships where I've used labels like partner/girlfriend/boyfriend before, and I still feel that these relationships challenged the learned behaviors that RAD critiques in their zines. My reasons for challenging these behaviors weren't because it was Politically Good or because I was trying to build a better world. I challenged them because it was what me and my partner *wanted to do together* — it was for **our own** reasons and our unique sense of liberation. As anarchists we wouldn't have been caught dead desecrating our outlaw love by putting it in the service of some higher cause.

There are two core issues with how RAD encourages you to drop labels like "partner":

1. RAD seems to deny any kind of poetic expression that language may have. For instance, if I call two people my "partner," that can mean a very different thing with each person. The words people choose to share with one another can be a gift, a term of endearment. I can make meaning with someone by choosing to use a certain word with within and against the flux of culture and context in which that word is used. Playing with language to create new meanings and sensations is enlivening. It's a lot more fun to use language and concepts in your own way instead of being beholden to the supposedly fixed and inherent meanings of words and ideas.

Why, in your own life, should you take language so seriously? Why hold it as something sacred, don't you have enough sacred things governing you already? RAD seems like they are only able to encounter a word by chaining it to a fixed conception of it. It's the same kind of chaining maneuver at play when they insist that it's not enough to step outside of the couple form - you then have to immediately chain your newfound freedom to a higher political cause - throwing out one god

only to instantly replace it with another.

2. The other issue has to do with the educational campaign RAD suggests. I'm not trying to set any kind of example for the masses with my relationships (or any other part of my life for that matter). Whether or not in a given situation I choose to use words like partner, *I'll never have any interest in policing my expression* in an attempt to coddle other people into following me. If someone in my life is struggling with how their normative relationship is going, I would definitely encourage them to explore other ways of being in the world. Encouraging the people in my life to break down dualistic categories like platonic/romantic is easy for me to do because it comes from a place of love and wanting to see those I care about thrive from self-determining their lives. On the other hand, it's just another kind of work for me to encourage people in the abstract to change how they live - to teach the uneducated how to do the right thing. In fact, I do take a little pleasure in how onlookers tend to find the queer ways I relate to others as something... unintelligible and hopefully even a little grotesque. My anarchism will never adhere to our society's frenzied desire for representation - so much of its power comes from it not being a public service announcement.

In the zines *Cheat to Win* and *I'm a Proud #homewrecker*, AMA RAD explores how the idea of cheating is permissible and tries to argue how it's even an insurgent form of political direct action against Monogamism. RAD convincingly elaborates how the default for many relationships are rooted in sexist rules that tend to be structured via the possession of one person by the other. This state of affairs absolutely limits people's access to resources and can keep people trapped in abusive patterns, sure. Putting aside the questionable efficacy of their homewrecking activism, what feels really sneaky here is how RAD is taking something which mainstream morality deems bad, like infidelity, and inverting that script instead of going beyond it.

They would have us believe that Cheating isn't actually bad, it's *good*. That it's *useful* for achieving political goals.

It's pretty unlikely that there's really even such a thing like "winning." Even if there was, I'm skeptical that it'd be achieved with enough people "doing the right thing." Even if we (and it's worth asking what higher power forms the "we" here anyway?) could "win," it in no way seems like something desirable for an anarchist - again, doesn't this just amount to replacing one dogmatic conception of intimacy with another one?